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State GOP endorses Specter

Freind loses bid for open primary

By Wanda Motley
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HARRISBURG — The Republican State Committee yesterday resoundingly endorsed U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter for re-election, rejecting an appeal by his opponent, Delaware County state Rep. Stephen F. Freind, for an open primary in April.

The 271-member committee's voice vote was virtually unanimous for Specter, who is seeking his third term, and for two other incumbents, Attorney General Ernie Preate Jr. and Auditor General Barbara Hafer.

Freind promptly labeled the Specter endorsement "a charade." Specter took some shots at Freind, but said he'd at least consider a debate with his opponent.

State committee members did not hold an endorsement vote for President Bush. Officials said they would wait until the President formally announced his re-election bid. And though there have been rumblings throughout the nation in recent months that Bush's re-election effort might be headed for trouble, Pennsylvania's GOP showed no sign of worry yesterday.

National Committeewoman Elsie H. Hillman said Bush would "run very well," adding that she expected Specter to do the same despite criticism from women's groups for his role in the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on sexual-harassment allegations against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Between Specter and Bush, Hillman said, "I don't know who'll have the longer coattail."

Specter said in his acceptance speech, "I think the clarion call is

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State GOP backs Specter re-election

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here" — a reference to Freind's announced run for the GOP senatorial spot on the November ballot.

"I think we have a duty to pull together as a party, not for Arlen Specter or even President Bush, but for the interest of our state and the country and the world," Specter said.

He and other party leaders said party unity was crucial to keeping Bush in the White House, noting that the President won Pennsylvania narrowly in the 1988 election.

Freind, who has labeled Specter and state party officials as out of touch with grass-roots Republicans, immediately criticized the endorsement, blasting the state committee for refusing to hold a roll-call vote. Committee members voted down a motion for a roll call.

"This whole process is a charade. There is no relation between what goes on here, and the rank and file," said Freind, likening the party's endorsement process to "doing business behind closed doors." The party's six regional caucuses held separate votes Friday night, all supporting Specter.

Anne Anstine, state chairwoman, defended the process, saying, "We are the grass roots. This is the grass roots." She said there would be little benefit to holding an open primary, adding, "The function of the Republican State Committee is to endorse candidates."

Freind also criticized Specter's call for party unity heading into the April 28 primary and the November elections, saying Specter's record in Congress showed that he had often bucked the party position.

"The man who torpedoed Justice Bork is now talking about party unity," Freind said, referring to President Ronald Reagan's unsuccessful nomination of Judge Robert H. Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1987. Specter cast a key vote against confirming Bork.

Specter yesterday accused Freind of hurting the party. He said Freind's support of a Democrat, Gov. Casey,

The Republican State Committee rejected State Rep. Stephen F. Freind's plea for an open party primary.

against two Republican nominees — Bill Scranton in 1986 and Barbara Hafer in 1990 — was "a causal factor" in Democratic control of the governor's office. Casey's wins "can be laid at the foot of my opponent in this campaign," Specter said.

After the meeting, Specter said he might consider a debate with Freind, who is demanding such a forum. The incumbent cast Freind as a single-issue candidate.

"There is absolutely no doubt that without the abortion issue, he would not be a candidate," said Specter. Freind is the state's best-known opponent of legalized abortion.

Specter also said this would probably be the last time he mentioned his opponent before the primary.

The only mystery of the weekend meeting was who would get the party's nomination for state treasurer. Until late Thursday, party leaders had been fruitlessly phoning around the state in efforts to come up with a candidate.

The committee gave its blessing to last-minute draftee Lowman Henry, of Greensburg, Westmoreland County, who has been active in state Republican politics for the last 12 years. He is president of the Pennsylvania Leadership Council, a conservative pro-business group.

Hafer received the endorsement for re-election as auditor general over two other contenders, Jan McDonald of Perry County, and Jack E. Bower, chairman of Upper Merion township's Board of Auditors. Preate is unopposed for renomination as attorney general.